

VZCZCXRO6899

OO RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTI #0299 1381302
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 181302Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8124
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2488

UNCLAS TIRANA 000299

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE J.ISMAIL

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: ID CARD UPDATE - CITY OF BERAT

REF: TIRANA 0159

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: An Embassy team on May 15 made a follow-up visit to the central Albanian city of Berat to check the ID card registration process and get an overall feel for local attitudes concerning the elections. In Berat, interlocutors told the Embassy that the decision to provide subsidized IDs has come late in the process and involves too many institutions and structures, making the process unnecessarily slow, cumbersome and confusing. Meetings with a range of local officials seemingly confirm what Post has been hearing anecdotally from other parts of the country: that the implementation of plans to provide discounted IDs for many voters has been problematic, with many voters complaining that the process is frustratingly confusing, complicated and expensive. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Some pensioners, students and some people on welfare qualify for receiving ID cards for 200 leke or for free. However, administrative requirements to get a discounted ID have discouraged many. First, a citizen must take his birth certificate to a local post office to obtain a coupon for partial or complete payment of the ID card fee. The post office supposedly has lists established by a local government council and state police of everyone who qualifies, but our contacts said the lists are far from complete. (Note: To get a birth certificate, the local civil registry requires proof that local taxes have been paid, a sum of 2,500 leke per year, or more than twice the full price of the ID card. The Minister of Interior issued a ruling several weeks ago suspending this requirement, but it is still being enforced in some areas. End Note.) The citizen then takes the coupon to the application center, where again he must find his name on a list issued by the police verifying that he does not have a passport, and on another list from the government council verifying that the person qualifies for a subsidized card.

¶3. (U) Once a citizen has applied, there is no way he can know when his ID card is ready for pick up. Nominally, the process takes about 20 days, but some political leaders complain that citizens in the "wrong" political area have waited as long as two months. There is no way for a citizen to find out if his ID card has been delayed for some reason, or has been lost altogether, as has happened - he must keep checking back with the center. (NOTE: Problems have not been limited to rural areas alone - a Tirana city official told PolOff that a large number of ID card applications made in Tirana in early February have been lost, meaning that many applicants must reapply. However, a fight has ensued over how these "lost" applicants can reapply without having to repay the fee. END NOTE).

¶4. (U) Another problem area has to do with payment to Sagem, the company responsible for producing the cards. Their contract requires payment of 1200 leke per card, and for some reason, this must be done at local post offices rather than centrally. The post office prepares a file for every discount coupon, which the municipality submits to the central government for payment. The central government was supposed to advance funds to municipalities, but the mayor of Berat complained that the central government told him they would pay after the elections, forcing him to come up with

funds from his own municipal budget.

15. (U) COMMENT: As expected, the devil in any way forward on ID cards would be in the details, and this is where the process seems to have bogged down at the local level. Overall, the number of daily ID card applicants is up sharply over April and March, but even the government has trouble identifying how many of those applicants lack passports and are thus the people who truly need an ID in order to vote. For now, the opposition parties are relatively quiet regarding IDs, but further confusion at the local level could quickly lead to hot rhetoric and accusations in Tirana. The opposition Socialist Party continues to watch the ID card process closely, and only last week party leader Edi Rama upped the ante by hinting at an SP boycott should the SP determine that not enough ID cards are getting into the hands of voters. ODIHR long-term election monitors have deployed around Albania in recent days. These monitors, along with Embassy election monitoring trips around the country, will continue to keep a close eye on the ID process.

WITHERS